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Abstract

Several years ago the agricultural information staff at Washington State University listed the qualifications and concepts they felt an agricultural editor should have. Using those two lists as bases, 26 land-grant university agricultural editors - current, retired , and some who moved to other jobs - provided suggestions to make the lists more universally useful. Two deans of agriculture also sent suggestions.

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Everett Metcalf

Several years ago the agricultural information staff at Washington State University listed the qualifications and concepts they felt an agricultural editor should have. Using those two lists as bases, 26 land-grant university agricultural editors—current, retired, and some who moved to other jobs—provided suggestions to make the lists more universally useful. Two deans of agriculture also sent suggestions.

The college of agriculture communication setup varies among universities. Some units are integrated with the university public information office. Some combine extension and research information—others separate the two, and some combine extension research information with instruction.

Just as diverse are titles used to designate what this paper calls the agricultural editor: chairperson, head, coordinator, extension editor, director, leader, manager.

The diversity of titles makes it difficult to come up with qualifications and desired concepts that are useful to everyone. Yet, large portions of the two lists presented here are likely to apply to most situations. They should at least evoke lively discussion.

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Qualifications of an Agricultural Editor

Qualifications involve a mix of tangible and intangible considerations. Education, experience, and accomplishments usually can be easily assessed. Such qualities as creativity, objectivity, and ability to relate to staff and administrators can be more difficult to evaluate. A good qualifications list should help predict if an individual will do a good job.

1. Accomplished, respected communicator.
2. At least one degree in communications desirable—extensive communications experience may be an acceptable substitute.
3. Advanced degree desirable.
4. Broad understanding of communications, public relations, and the various media.
5. Understanding of extension, research, and teaching.
6. Knowledgeable about application of communications theory and research.
7. Leadership experience and administrative skills.
8. Ability to relate positively to administrators, even while challenging them in upholding a particular concept.
9. Creative, with numerous ideas, and willing to accept ideas of others.
10. Ability to put plans into action, coordinate efforts into a meaningful operation, set priorities, and delegate responsibilities to staff.
11. Ability to motivate staff toward excellence and to resourcefully develop their talents.
12. Ability to be objective and forthright in counseling and evaluating staff.
13. Ability to recognize and hire talent—willing for staff to gain greater recognition than self.
14. Efficient and decisive—moves things out.
15. Ability to build confidence and support, internally and externally, and use feedback to reinforce and improve information programs.
16. Ability to represent College of Agriculture to the public.

Desirable Concepts an Agricultural Editor Brings to the Job

Concepts concern the way an agricultural editor sees the total job—in a sense the individual's philosophies. The list reflects concepts a successful agricultural editor likely would have.

Administration and coordination of the communication

program and staff are the primary job. Production work is secondary, but influenced by the size of operation.

2. A major responsibility is to create a climate so staff members can do the most professional job possible. Staff must have backing as priorities are determined.
3. Staff unity is essential and can be fostered through regular meetings to share ideas and information and for staff member input in decision making.
4. Overall direction to the staff is essential, as well as serving as a facilitator and counselor as each staff member assumes responsibility for his or her part.
5. Long-range planning is necessary. The staff requires adequate planning time and yet must remain flexible enough to handle fast-breaking and emergency situations.
6. Audience and client contacts are essential for the communication staff to better understand the needs.
7. Continuous contact with the media is essential.
8. The agricultural editor assertively assumes responsibility for the operation.
9. The agricultural editor assertively transmits staff and resource needs to administration and provides feedback to each group. Organized feedback and background information from administration are essential for communication specialists to properly reflect policy and concerns in their continuous contacts with audiences and clients.
10. Communication specialists are expected to assist specialists, agents, and researchers with individual communication plans and concerns.
11. Communications specialists need to be involved in planning and conducting training for agents, specialists, and researchers, but only after all agree upon what training is most needed.
12. Training should relate to what the extension and research worker will actually be able to do in his or her program.
13. Professional improvement is essential.
14. Evaluation surveys and research are part of a viable communication program.
15. The agricultural editor coordinates efforts with the overall university public information office.
16. Cooperation with state organizations, other states, and regional and national offices can improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Comments from one respondent appropriately summarizes this paper.

"Obviously, the styles of information leadership will vary with the person. Style is influenced by the person's personality, background, level of education, etc.

"Since _____ is such an effective administrator, I want to spend some time talking about him specifically. He has a Ph.D. (optional as far as I'm concerned, but I think a Masters or at least some work toward one would be a must in a university setting) and he carries a rank of full professor (which we think is also essential in an academic environment).

"His strong suit is picking good people, giving them just a bit of direction, and encouraging them to fully exploit their potential. He is generous with praise for his staff (he not only tells you when you are doing a good job, but he also tells administrators).

"And he has done a terrific job of establishing credibility for himself and his staff with our clientele (editors, faculty, etc.) and our administrators. He has built a reputation for himself and this office of good service and **leadership** in communication. **We** are the communications **experts**. That's what he tells other people. That's what he expects of us. That's the way we perform.

"He encourages us to play the academic game. Since we carry academic rank, he feels that we should be involved in teaching, some research, training, and working on degrees.

"Finally, _____ is not afraid to get his hands dirty. He'll do some pretty mundane jobs just to make sure the work gets done, and he expects us to do the same. At the same time, he helps us screen out things we shouldn't do."